

Burn Like a Wet Match

by imperiousIndignation

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Summary: Jack stays out of fear of loneliness, and Hiccup stays out of spite.

1. A lasting first impression

The birds were lively, the wind a golden rush of careful caresses; a rare day in Berk, a day of spring. Hiccup trundled through the forest, pushing branches from his brow with his forearm, bow slung over his shoulder. He attempted stealth, but with his metal leg and his clumsiness, furtiveness was far from his forte. Today he was Toothless' apprentice, following the sleek black dragon into the forest. The snow was thick and white, crunching and crushing beneath Hiccup's footsteps as he approached a clearing in the brambles and underbrush, eyeing it closely and from a reasonable distance. Down a little stream of muddy water, the snow on the banks flattened by rabbits, were a couple of quail. Hiccup could see them far off, his vision keen and his breath coming in slow, thick pants. Oak seedlings were peeking up out of the winter white, their first bark new and naked in the crisp, cold morning air. Seemingly incandescent dew was suspended, miraculously unfrozen, from spider webs that laced the treetops like silk and casted a shimmer on the birds' backs.

Toothless was silent in the distance, the morning sun peeking through the budding treetops in golden columns. Hiccup squatted, calm and still, and drew his bow. Though his frame was far from the masculine build of his father, he had grown from his fifteen year old body and into a new one, thin but sleek and lithe. Sinuous muscle slithered beneath his skin, calculated and cautious, as he drew back his hand, the rough string of the bow chafing against the callouses on his fingers. His eyes narrowed, watching the bobbing heads of the birds as they dipped into the muddy water for a drink. He didn't think, didn't breathe, tongue darting out like the head of a snake to wet his cold lips. The muscles of his back pulled into tight, lean curves up his spine, the power of his frame focused in his hands.

He released the string, the twang of it the only sound besides the powerful whistling of the arrow. It sliced through the air, cleaving it perfectly, piercing the breast of one quail and going on to kill the other. It was split second spent, blood dotting the crisp white snow when it departed. Hiccup's eyes widened, smile stretching his chapped pink lips, smile crooked and white. He let out a nervous chuckle, racing forward over brambles and snow to his prize. Two birds with one stone, indeed.

Hiccup gathered up his prey; both birds were clean and meaty enough to supply a good dinner, he thought, retrieving his arrow from the ground. The two birds were warm and full in his hands, still vivid with the quiet power of life when he placed them carefully into his satchel, murmuring quiet thanks to the forest. A nasty business it was, killing the birds, but he got used to it. He never killed more than he needed, but even with the farming in the village, he still had to hunt to keep his father fed. After all, a shortage of food was the last thing he wanted, especially since he now had summer at his disposal to spend looking for migrating birds and bucks nearby to store for the next winter. The blood on the ground was brilliant and shone under the sun, specks of red and torn snow where his arrow had marred its pristine surface. Hiccup inhaled deeply the pure air of the forest, the smell of fresh snow and rotting leaves. Everything stung a little, from the sharpness of the sunlight to the cold air in his mouth and nose, fresh and new in the morning. It was rare to have days so warm, Hiccup knew, when saplings could reach up into the sky and bulbs of forgotten plants could come up in sunny places where the snow was thin.

Hiccup whistled, fingers in his mouth, as he turned around. From somewhere, he heard Toothless howl back at him, scaring up a murder of crows nearby. Hiccup licked his lips, his face chilled and stinging, and moved onward. He'd have to get back before long if he was going to get to take a ride on Toothless in the evening. As much as he'd like to be on the dragon's back all the time, the forest was too dense for the dragon to fly through, and Hiccup wasn't allowed to go out and fool around when there was work to be done at home. He still had a few hours of work owed to Gobber, being a smith and all.

As Hiccup wound his way back through the woods, he came upon a pond. It was a sunken area of the forest, tree limbs bowing down into it, snow preserved on its surface in a flat, perfect white blanket, save for the rabbit tracks that peppered it in little dots. Hiccup smiled when he saw it; this was a usual haunt for him as a child, where he'd go to play and ice skate. Hiccup thought about it for a moment, wondering if he'd be missed if he were gone for a few extra minutes.

"Ah, old Jokul, lets hope you've done a good job on this." Hiccup said, breathing out quietly, his breath fanning out in front of him in ribbons of white mist. He edged down to the pond, like he was visiting an old friend, his metal foot all but an extension of his body and as natural to his movement as the leg that had a foot on the end. Hiccup had always been a practical thinker, but even he was not always spared moments of sentimentality such as this. When he reached the bank of the pond he knelt, pushing his naked, chilled hand into the snow and clearing it away. Frozen water plants muddled the surface, preserved snail shells, tiny and white, lurking under the

surface. Still, the ice seemed to shine with mazy patterns of frost that the snow would catch on. Hiccup smiled and ran his hand over them, feeling the prickling texture as it caught the grooves of his fingerprint. It was fragile, and when he drew his hand back he had melted it into nothing.

He was about to stand and leave when he felt himself suddenly shoved to the ground. Cold, wet, and angry, his face met with the ice of the pond in a loud, shattering smack. Hiccup groaned and wondered why this sort of thing always happened to him, particularly in times when he was trying to enjoy himself. At least Astrid wasn't around to see it, she'd have a field day. He swore he heard laughter from somewhere, warped and contorted like an echo. Hiccup stood bolt upright, snow falling down the back of his top.

"Who threw that?!" he barked out into the still forest, which quite predictably offered no condolences to speak of. His eyebrows drew together and he snorted angrily, the scene of perfect morning ruined by some juvenile prankster. Then he heard that quiet giggling again, always warped and bubbling, metallic like it was just a little too far away, half in his world and half out. "What is that?" Hiccup muttered to himself, looking around with his keen eyes to find naught but the forest staring back at him.

He heard the thundering of Toothless's wings and the drumming of his feet as the dragon geared in across the pond from him. He turned to look at Toothless, who kicked up snow wherever he went and seemed wary of the ice. The dragon's sleek black body was easy to see in the snow, despite how well he camouflaged in the night, stark against it like a swatch of black paint on an empty canvas. "Did I scare you?" Hiccup murmured, standing up and brushing the snow off of the back of his neck. The sun was rising higher in the sky, it was almost mealtime for the great dragon. "C'mon, just some dumb prankster. Probably Ruffnut and Tuffnut again." Hiccup grunted indignantly, adjusting his back and clothes so that he looked less disheveled.

"Dumb prankster? I'm an artist, you lousy goon!" that warped voice, distant and swirling, taunted back to him.

Hiccup's head snapped around, eyes narrowing into slits. He surveyed the forest, which was once again silent. That voice was not earthly; Hiccup could suspend his disbelief, and quickly decided that normal people didn't sound like that. A troll, perhaps, or a sprite of some kind; though he had never met one in person, the village wise woman had warned him of them at every opportunity.

"I heard that. . . get out here, before I poke holes in you!" Hiccup shouted, drawing his bow and cocking it back, the finely tuned instrument like a branching extension of his arm. His voice seemed to fall on deaf ears, the only sound being the soft chatter of birds and Toothless's breath coming out in hard, thick breaths. Hiccup cursed himself for his vantage point, shooting up from the lake; always a disservice to the likelihood that he would see his target before his target could attack him. Everything seemed to still into stagnation, the silence so tense that Hiccup felt aware of every tendon in his arm, every breath he drew through clenched jaws that chilled and dried his teeth. His eyes darted over the gaps between the trees, which offered no solace, save for a disappearing rabbit and the swaying of the brush in the breeze.

Slowly, Hiccup turned to check on Toothless, who had been strangely quiet for being in such a tense situation; usually the dragon was quick to jump to attention and cause a ruckus. He found Toothless staring intensely at the place above him, just a few feet in the air atop his head.

"What are you looking a-" Hiccup stopped talking, split second nerves taking over. As quick as the thought occurred, it triggered several others. He snapped his gaze directly upward, pointing his arrow straight into the air. What he saw was not the sky, confusing to his mind for only a second before it was in his eyes. He spluttered as a lump of snow was dropped on his face like a rock, stinging his nose as he spat, finding it to be tainted with twigs and leaves.

"Alright, alright, that's enough!" Hiccup shouted, stomping and throwing his bow angrily on the ground. His teeth gritted together as he heard that strange cackling become more solid, human almost. Peals of metallic laughter, one after the other, flying around him, locationless and distorted. It was moving so fast around him, he could barely keep up with it, spinning to find its source. "Get out here, I can hear you, you stupid oaf!" he shouted weakly. He wasn't sure at all what he was dealing with, not a dragon and certainly not a mischievous pair of twins. He picked his bow up and drew it back again, pointing it around and cursing himself for being so hopelessly open to assault. This would be easier if his target didn't know where he was; Hiccup may not have been good at being quiet, but he was such a good shot that he could assume it from a distance that would render his shortcomings obsolete.

"Wait, did you just say...?" Hiccup heard the voice as it circled him. Flashes in the corner of his eye, that was all. Pieces of something pale, flitting around him like a leaf. Hiccup couldn't get a draw on it, it was far too fast. Toothless' pupils narrowed into slits as the dragon tensed back onto his haunches, nostrils flaring out hot breaths into the cold air. Hiccup settled, looking at Toothless, who stared right back at him, staring into the space just beyond Hiccup's shoulder.

"You...did you just say you can hear me?" Hiccup heard it, directly behind him, so close and so soft that it made every hair on his body feel like it was standing on end. It was like he could feel it on his shoulder, slithering up his spine, a presence so unbearably near that it was almost touching him. Hiccup tried to do a complete turn and catch whatever was taunting him, but his metal foot landed on the ice, where it slid out from under him in one swift misstep. With a yelp he fell backwards onto the ice, the back of his head hitting it with a splitting crack. Pain raced down his spine, his vision going white for a second, barely registering the low, ominous crack of the ice. His bow clattered out onto the pond, his ears ringing, something hot trickling down the back of his head. He grunted and closed his eyes, rolling over and touching the back of his head. His hand came away wet and hot, and when he opened his eyes it was blood that tainted his fingertips.

He heard Toothless make a noise and someone talking, but the ringing hadn't yet subsided, still a clamoring echo drumming against the inside of his skull. Curse his idiotic clumsiness, at such a vital moment it had reared its ugly head. Then he felt hands on his body,

pulling him away as water began to leak between the cracks in the ice, briefly wetting the back of his fur coat and some of his hair. He snarled, but could manage little more, disoriented and bleeding. He could taste metal and salt in his mouth; blood, he must have bitten his tongue. "Get off me!" He tried to shout, but it only hurt his head to make noise. He scrambled with his hands but the ice was slick, and soon he found himself being dragged up the bank, cold hands under his arms.

"You, can you hear me?" Suddenly someone was jostling him. That voice, gravelly yet gentle, was the voice of the teasing stranger.

"Yes, I can, stop shoving me you cretin!" Hiccup snarled, yelping as he was picked up and nearly thrown against a tree. Suddenly there were hands all over him, touching his chest, his face, carding through his hair.

"Oh, oh my. . . this has never happened before, I never thought-you can hear me? I can touch you, you feel so. . ." Hiccup opened his eyes. For a moment everything was blurry and overly vibrant, but after a few hard blinks he could see with moderate success. Toothless circled nervously in the background, head low and pupils narrow. Before him was a boy, about his age, with snow-white hair and eyes like the purest swatch of blue he'd ever seen. He was pale, dotted with faint freckles, his lips purplish blue, everything about his face overly white and sharp, like a frozen corpse. Hiccup stared, unable to understand what he was seeing. Breath heaved through the excited creature, whose glassy eyes threatened to overflow with lustrous tears. The cold hands examining him continued their quest, attention tangential, pushing against Hiccup's chest as if expecting to fall through it. The boy was young and pretty, like he didn't belong in Berk, clothed in wears not sold in any shop in Hiccup's village; definitely foreign.

"Why are you touching me so much..." Hiccup muttered, overwhelmed, the bark of the tree digging into his head wound. Blue eyes met his and rendered Hiccup speechless, crushed under the weight of the moment, of how emotional this creature was, lips and eyelashes trembling, the crease that knitted between his eyebrows, the hesitant, broken smile. His eyelashes were wet and quivering, breath shaky and unsteady, some mounting pressure behind his eyes that Hiccup wasn't ready for, couldn't counter from a stranger. Hiccup tried to scuttle away, mashing down the snow where he scrambled, pushing himself further up against the tree, only to have the nymph follow him, hands rubbing up and down his chest, his arms, his neck. Those hands were chilled, unlike human hands, like they were made of marble that was somehow malleable.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, I thought I was going to live like this forever, until I died. . . nobody was going to. . . thank you, thank you. . ." The creature leaned in suddenly, placing a cold, tight and tremulous kiss to the corner of Hiccup's mouth, arms snaking around Hiccup like iron bars. Hiccup squirmed, but only managed to get snow up the back of his shirt and slide down the tree. He felt cold droplets on his neck as the spirit buried his head into the lily crook of it, the arch seeming to be a perfect fit for his face, simply clicking into place. Hiccup could feel a cold nose pressed to his sensitive skin, lips moving, breath fanning out in cold puffs that sent shivers down his spine.

"You...get off of me!" Hiccup began to struggle in earnest, head throbbing, vision going in and out as he thrashed weakly. Behind the nymph, Toothless gnashed his jaws and moved his tail back and forth, not sure what to do with himself. Hiccup tried to reach his bow, but when he looked for it he saw it sinking into the cracks in the ice on the pond. Too far away and unable to save it, he groaned loudly; at least the two quail were still in his bag. Hiccup tried to get a good grip on something to wedge himself out from under the white haired sprite, but snow melted under his touch as he worked himself up, nose and fingertips cherry red and punctuated with dark freckles.

"Oh, yes, of course, sir, I'm..." The creature drew back, releasing his embrace but keeping his hands in place, icy blue eyes wide and apprehensive. Slowly he leaned in, hand sliding up chest and neck until it was touching Hiccup's head. When he drew his hand back there was blood on his pale fingertips, hot and mean against his spider-like hand. "I did that..." The spirit muttered, looking back at Hiccup, then to his hand, then back to Hiccup. The moment was tense, where Hiccup wasn't sure if he was being assaulted or just pestered by some emotionally damaged spirit. His world was spinning; so many strange things had just happened, and his near concussion wasn't helping him think things through. Hiccup opened his mouth to snap back at the lunatic, but the creature put a hand over his mouth and looked at him curiously. "Quiet, now. Just let me look at you." Hiccup felt nervous and atingle when the spirit began to scrutinize him in honesty, eyes traveling up and down Hiccup's body. He felt a little insecure, being examined so closely, even in a situation where he thought he might be in danger. The spirit cracked a grin and caught Hiccup's nervous gaze, leaning forward and breathing heavily. "You're a real specimen, you know it? C'mon, I'll help you, you clumsy oaf." The creature wrapped his arms around Hiccup's shoulders and tried to lift him, but to no avail.

"Vikings aren't a lightweight people." Hiccup grunted in response, surrendering himself to the strangeness of the situation. He knew that he could die out here in the forest with just a minor injury like this. He was miles from home and hypothermia could set in easily if he let himself stop moving, which was tempting as his vision flickered in and out and his thoughts swam. Toothless came closer and nipped nervously at the spirit's back, but failed to get his attention.

"Either that or you're just a big, meaty lug. Scratch that, you're far to twiggy and pitiful for that." The creature laughed at him, and tried again, this time with his hands under Hiccup's arms. He got closer, managing to pull Hiccup up until the boy could at least partially steady himself on his own feet. The light coming down from the treetops seemed to swell and undulated in Hiccup's eyes as he clung to the white haired boy, face pressed to a cold, heaving chest.

"My bow, I need..." Hiccup grunted, trying to steady himself, his false leg creaking with strain. The spirit ignored him and tried to shove him upward to get a better grip. "Hey, are you listening? I.." Hiccup hit the spirit's back. "...am..." He hit it again, this time with an open palm. "...a brave, valiant...urgh..viking..." Hiccup almost puked down the boy's back; he was sure the gesture would go unappreciated. He was going to be late and not get his chores done, not be able to work for Gobber, and certainly be sentenced to days of

bedrest. He groaned at the prospect; though Hiccup was benign and cautious by the standards of the people of Berk, he was also not one to be stuck in bed for days.

"More like a brave, valiant numbskull who nose dived into the ice like a total goon." the boy chortled, lifting Hiccup unceremoniously and leaning back accommodate the weight. Hiccup found that he was a good two inches taller than the sprite, and added that to his checklist of people he had grown to be taller than. Hiccup may have been twiggy, but he was also his father's son.

"Just, put me on Toothless..." Hiccup urged. The dragon whined and licked at Hiccup's bloodied hand, the scratchy surface of the dragon's tongue making noise on his coarse palm.

"You may be a mighty dragon trainer, but you're also the first person who has ever seen me. I'll give you a ride personally!" Hiccup could practically hear the condescending smirk curling up the edges of the creature's voice. Hiccup's toes curled and his hair stood on end, nerves buzzing. He dug his fingers into the sprite's shoulders, the flesh giving to his touch despite appearing to be struck by rigor mortis, his clothes worn thin from an apparently frequent history of use. He smelled of spiced wood and fresh pond water, something old and familiar in the way that fireplaces and favorite toys were. Hiccup grunted and thought about how much he'd like to be at home, working with Gobber, talking to his Dad, spending time with Astrid; anything but getting a concussion and being raced home by some spirit boy. Perhaps his head trauma had blessed him with a veil of indifference, because Hiccup couldn't muster much caring about the seemingly ethereal young man or his motives.

"And how, pray tell, will you be doing that, ghost boy?" Hiccup tried to snap but his voice cracked when his head throbbed in response to his temper. His voice seemed to send sharp vibrations up his jaw and into his skull, where they bounced around until they escaped through his watering eyes. A few days bed rest, indeed, and he still had to feed toothless at the least. Even though friendliness towards dragons was generally practiced, feeding was a thing that humans didn't usually do because of how territorial dragons could get about food. Nobody could really feed Toothless except Hiccup, and it was only because Toothless trusted him; otherwise, the dragon could easily snap and arm out of a socket, tear it off, and swallow it whole. Fortunately, Stoick seemed to understand that animal's territorial nature more than anything, and just let Hiccup do as he pleased.

"We're going to fly!" the creature sang, hooking his hands into Hiccup's belt and pulling him up so their chests pressed together. Hiccup tried to get steady footing, but his vision was swimming with unnecessary vehemence, and every time he tried to push himself upright the world would turn and he'd fall back into the creature's arms. He grunted and tried to get a better grip on the being. "Quit struggling, I'll drop you." the pale boy snapped; Hiccup wasn't really keen on the idea of flying or the idea of vomiting down this boy's back, two things which might go hand in hand. "Stop fussing, we'll be good friends soon enough." the puerile pixie snorted, sarcasm in his voice like a hot poker.

"I can already feel the warm, tingly butterflies of disdain." Hiccup growled. "Yes, I have a minor concussion, please be sure to pick me

up and shake my neck around vigorously." he growled quietly. He was growing increasingly frustrated with not being able to stand and the stranger's general attitude. Also, he wasn't so quick to forget that this stranger was the reason for his injury in the first place, though he thought better than to bring it up when the boy could easily leave him to die in the woods.

"Oh, you're gonna love this!" Hiccup had the distinct impression that he was not, in fact, going to love this. The spirit reared back, grabbed Hiccup carefully, and looked skyward. Behind him, Toothless eyed the whole situation with trepidation. Hiccup gripped his bag to his side, not wanting to lose his prize, though he longed for his bow which had long since sunk into the depths of the little pond and was probably beyond his capacity of retrieval. He only had a second to think about it before he saw the spirit's bare feet, like little blue paws in the snow, leave the ground, kicking up white and suddenly pushing everything far away, pistoning forward so that his vision did not have time to keep up with physical sensation.

There was a sudden lurching behind Hiccup's naval, his ears first perceiving a cry from toothless and then the sound of his environment screaming by him. Everything seemed to jolt to a start, the light filtering down between the treetops consuming his vision, bolts of white piercing his brain like little shards of rebounding hail. The wind was so sharp and cold on his face that his chapped lip split, blood running down his chin in a fount pressed by the stinging spring air. He could hear birds shrieking and cawing and flapping their wings to get out of the way, his bag jerking around in the wind. It was only a few seconds before they cleared the treetops and the sun blinded Hiccup in a bolt down his core. He felt the contents of his stomach heave upward, sick bile filling his mouth for only a second before he leaned away from the spirit boy and vomited. He barely heard Jack shouting in surprise or the sound of Toothless roaring behind them. He saw black worms eating at the edges of his vision, something slimy and far away, little insects crawling across his eyes, limbs melting, mouth full of cotton, ears full of wasps.

Hiccup lost consciousness in midair.

* * *

><p>First attempt at writing: complete.<p>

I'm just gonna keep wasting time in this fashion until spring break is over sjkdknfa... man, I should be doing productive things, but here I am in stead. Whoops. Mother would be so proud.

Anyway I don't think anyone actually reads these, but if you do, I'd like to apologize for my trainwreck writing. It seems I can't hold up a singular train of thought for more than five minutes, and this felt like it was awfully long for being one scene. Jeez.

2. Bedrest

Hiccup could hear them talking downstairs, his father's and Astrid's voice leaking up through the beams and floorboards. He didn't really want to put thought into what they were talking about, his head throbbing painfully every time he opened his eyes or there was a loud

noise nearby. Stuck somewhere halfway between dreams and reality, some incomprehensible, incomplete location, Hiccup rolled over in his bed and pulled a pillow over his head, hoping it would muffle the sounds of the arrangement being discussed downstairs. The pillow was cold on his ear; nice, he thought, cooling to his fever. He had been in bed for a solid two days and spent most of that time being told to stay put and get well soon. Well, with the exception of Jack, who didn't seem to care whether or not he stayed put or got well soon. Jack's priorities appeared to consist primarily of cataloguing his every experience via Hiccup, sitting up above his bed and chattering endlessly, even when Hiccup began to grow sick of his fairy tales and throw things from his bedside table at the sprite. Jack had introduced himself the second Hiccup had awoke, already back at his house courtesy of Toothless, who had singed a good portion of Jack's cloth cape in response to the manhandling Hiccup was subjected to. Although he didn't remember the journey home, Hiccup was at least thankful that he hadn't died in the forest, which had been a very real possibility. Being wet and bleeding in the snow was the last thing any person from Berk wanted, and a real threat. People lost limbs to frostbite far more than they lost them to dragons or battle, and Stoick seemed at the very least relieved that Hiccup had made it out alive. He was very happy with the quail Hiccup brought, too, although he seemed less concerned with dinner and more concerned with making sure Hiccup didn't die of hypothermia.

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**When Hiccup had woken up the for first time after his return he had been laying in front of his father's fireplace, face pressed to a bearskin rug, his whole body sickly and hot. It was hard to move and a little scary, the flames ethereal and strange to his vision. It was a half-memory, really, obscured by things he dreamed while awake. He remembered Jack's hand on him as he whispered introductions into Hiccup's ear along with apologies, his cold palm welcome on Hiccup's warm forehead. The fever set in quickly, and was remarkably ruthless that first night.

Hiccup sat up; Jack was at the foot of his bed, flipping through his leather-bound book. It was large, heavy like a brick, its pages already yellowed and marked up with charcoal and pencil. Hiccup groaned low in his throat and squinted his eyes shut; at least he could sit up, feeling all of his blood displace and make him dizzy. His feet were being sat on, cold because of Jack's inherent chilled temperature, the creature's leg flipped over his knee as he thumbed through the pages of Hiccup's guidebook. He had a wide-eyed, curious look on his face, lower lip sucked into his mouth, white hair falling over his eyes. The elegant bridge of his nose had little pale purple freckles on it, like someone had sprinkled stardust onto his cheeks. His fingers were long like branches, different from Hiccup's work worn hands, smooth and soft. Jack was a mess preserved in teenage form, barely free from the precipice of puberty, all adams apple and elbows with a hint of muscle, just enough to be able to fling himself effortlessly through the forest. Jack had removed his burned cape, his baggy white tunic and sleeveless brown jacket seeming slightly too big for him, bunching up at his thin wrists and worn so thin it felt like silk. It slid softly over his skin, hanging over his lean frame like a drape.

Hiccup narrowed his eyes. He tried not to hear his father talking; even when the man was trying to keep things quiet, his voice was a booming roar through the house, shaking its very foundation. Jack didn't seem to mind at all, and in fact had, over the past few days, seemed quite wrapped in the experience of being inside of a

household. He told Hiccup that he didn't go inside much because nobody ever invited him-Hiccup was far too tired to tell him that he hadn't invited him, either-but that it was a welcoming experience to hear the loud voices. Jack's company had turned out to be a blessing, since Astrid visited infrequently and when she did she often wanted to roughhouse. Hiccup wasn't really able to roughhouse with a concussion, but after a couple of days bedrest he was feeling better.

Jack had broken a lot of things in Hiccup's room. When Hiccup woke again in his bed, he had seen Jack knocking things over, rifling through Hiccup's things, talking nonstop. Hiccup wondered if Jack had been some kind of village outcast, given his nature and apparent insanity.

Hiccup took umbrage at having his things rifled through, but at the time hadn't been able to stop Jack at all. Now he was strong enough to yank the book out of Jack's blue paws and press it to his chest, giving the boy a narrow, sideways look. Jack seemed startled, but then smiled at Hiccup, broad and perfect, white teeth shining and blinking at him like ivory.

"Hey, look who's up!" Jack sang, jumping up so that he was on the bed completely, on all fours and looking at Hiccup with eyes that screamed excitement. Hiccup pressed the book closer to his chest, and sighed, sliding down in his bed. He wasn't quite ready to be assailed, but it seemed that was the direction things were going in. He never really thought much about spirits until there was one on top of him, staring down at him like some new cut of meat. His opinion of spirits had been generally good until this one came along.

"You know, my impression of you would be greatly improved if you'd give me some space." Hiccup grunted, pushing one hand lazily on Jack's chest, as if the boy would move. Jack rolled his eyes and sighed.

"Man, you are such a grouch. You know, nobody has been able to talk to or see me in years, the least you could do is pretend to like me." Jack chastised, eyebrows high on his face, expression indignant. Hiccup had only known him for two days and was already stuck in his presence every hour of every day and night. Toothless was out having to fend for himself, catch his own food, and Hiccup was stuck with Jack Frost, or Jokul, or whatever. It was not a part of his reality that he ever thought he'd have to factor into his decision making, but Jack's recklessness made him a force to be reckoned with and something Hiccup had to take into account. He was very much subjected to the impish spirit's whim.

"Oh, Jack, thank you so much for almost killing me! I really enjoyed that, and I'd like to spend more time with you so you can injure me more often!" Hiccup mocked. "I love it when strangers attack me and then almost break my neck, do you also like long walks on the beach and puppy breath? We might be soul mates!" Jack just grinned openly, like he had been completely expecting that response. Hiccup pushed at him again, only to have Jack fall down next to him on the bed and take the book from him. Jack's head was propped up on his hand, elbow on Hiccup's pillow, book in his other hand. Hiccup snorted and blew a strand of hair out of his face, wondering if Toothless might be open to burning up the rest of Jack along with his little coat.

"So, you're like an animal doctor or an artist or something? Wouldn't have taken you for the type." Jack mused, flipping unceremoniously through the pages. Hiccup grunted noncommittally, but nobody else ever asked him about his work, so he begrudgingly answered.

"Yeah, I study the dragons, find remedies for their illnesses. They help a lot with finding cures for diseases and such that can work for humans, too. I observe them a lot." Hiccup answered, looking down into the book. It was leather bound, ties of sinew holding the old pages together. The issue of the book was his, but he had certainly added to it. The things he discovered were quickly becoming common practice in Berk, his advances in the field of prosthetics helpful both to himself and to others who had lost limbs to frostbite or dragon attacks. Even Toothless' prosthetic wing had been revamped, replaced with a metal casing of a caliber that was unheard of. Hiccup was proud of that one; the fake wing had fibers that connected to muscle tissue and would contract when it contracted, supplementing muscle that was lost and controlling the fake wing. That way Toothless could fly on his own, not needing Hiccup as much as he once did.

"Whoa." To Jack's credit, he seemed genuinely interested in Hiccup's work, flipping through the pages and letting his eyes roam over drawings and diagrams. Jack couldn't read the old Norse text, but he could see the pictures and infer meaning fairly well. "Is this your dragon?" Jack asked, pointing to a lively drawing of Toothless. It was an old one, and if Hiccup had more vitriol he might have snapped the book shut out of embarrassment, but he didn't.

"Yeah, that's him from when I was younger. He's gotten a bit bigger since then." Hiccup confirmed, letting Jack settle in next to him. It was strange to have someone other than Astrid get so physically close to him, but Hiccup found that he didn't mind. Jack was smiling, and it was warm and interesting to Hiccup, whose presence was rarely a call for such a beaming grin.

"From back when you saved everyone?" Jack asked, shooting Hiccup a sideways glance, smile tugging up at one end like he'd told an inside joke to himself. Hiccup rolled his eyes; he'd hardly call what he did heroism, but it was a turning point for him privately. He learned a lot of things about himself from that experience, the first of which being his own value. What he had long mistaken for modesty had turned out to be insecurity, something he had to conquer that day. It changed him as a person, for the better he had hoped.

"Yeah, I guess, if you want to get technical. I made a lot of last ditch decisions. How did you know about that?" Hiccup asked, turning his head to look at Jack, who looked away from him, almost bashful. He sucked his lip into his mouth for a moment and chewed it sheepishly before responding.

"Oh, well. I spend a lot of time in Berk, so I couldn't help but know about you. You were kind of a small town celebrity, still are. There's no crime in me knowing my stuff." Jack muttered. Hiccup just sighed; that was to be expected. In the short time he'd known Jack, Hiccup inferred many things, the first of which being that Jack was lonesome, reckless, and stubborn. It was a dangerous combination when mixed with his excitement to finally find someone who acknowledged him, and Jack would often scramble for attention only to be unsure of what to do with it once he had it. This seemed to be one of those

times, when he embarrassed himself a little. Hiccup didn't mind; he'd been in that boat with Astrid, back when he knew everything about her and she barely even knew he existed. In that way, he guessed he could sympathize with Jack. Being invisible, in the literal sense or otherwise, was never, ever pleasant.

Hiccup sighed low in his throat. "Well, it's fine. I mean, I know plenty about you, Jokul. You're a bit of a celebrity around here, too." Hiccup said, careful to keep his voice low. He noticed the level of noisiness from downstairs drop, which meant that they might hear him more easily. He didn't want anyone to think he was crazier than they already did.

Jack scoffed dryly. "Yeah, more like a damn pariah." Hiccup almost smiled, feeling a soft pull of fondness. "I can sympathize." he responded quietly.

Jack looked at Hiccup, blue eyes discerning, careful. Hiccup caught the stare like a butterfly out of midair, but couldn't read the clotting inflection beneath it, the way Jack's eyes seemed to close like shutters over some immense, thickened emotion. Just as quick as it was there, it was gone, like wrinkles smoothed out of a tablecloth, shedding the rat-grey disquiet like water. Jack was smiling again pretty quickly, flipping through the book and commenting on Hiccup's drawings, traces of that warm-blooded and fetid distress all but scattered to the wind. Hiccup wasn't sure what to make of those eyes that could turn on a dime, but he respected Jack's space. He didn't ask any questions, just continued their conversation.

After a while, Hiccup got used to talking to Jack. He was unpredictable and unprecedented in his interest in Hiccup, but his isolation left him rather self-centered and made it difficult for him to empathize with Hiccup's occasional discomfort. He seemed fairly desperate to become friends, which Hiccup could see went against his nature. Desperation didn't fit Jack well, and it always seemed to Hiccup that he was slightly out of it when they spoke. He also found that Jack would never really stop touching him almost obsessively, coming back at nearly regular intervals to rub a hand on his arm or just bump into him. It was like some grounding process, some assurance, and although Hiccup resented it at first, he accepted it after a while. He would just calm down and pretend that everything was normal when Jack would rub his hands up and down Hiccup's arms almost religiously, which he seemed entirely to unapologetic of. It was just like learning the parameters of a new friendship, except the friend had almost no personal space. He didn't like being casually touched, as he was raised without constant physical affection, but it was refreshing in its own way. Hiccup supposed he could make an exception, and let Jack spend time with him in his room, staying up well into the night talking.

Their conversation stayed tensely casual for a while, but as night edged on Hiccup continued hushed rhetoric with Jack even as his father stomped around down stairs. Jack's aggressive friendliness was starting to pay off; Hiccup smiled more than once, chuckling softly at Jack's jokes, letting Jack share bedspace with him while they talked. Soon Hiccup's biting comments were friendly rather than accusatory, pushing buttons in stead of pulling strings. Jack would light up every time Hiccup would speak to him first, initiate a conversation, or let Jack touch him. The touching seemed relentlessly

important, like Jack was starved for it, like he couldn't simply not have it. Even though Hiccup's fever got a little worse at night, Jack kept him cool, always nearby.

Hiccup went to sleep that night with a winter spirit curled up under his blankets, cold body pressed to his side. Jack didn't need to sleep, but when Hiccup began to drift off he seemed to abhor the idea of leaving the house, like Hiccup might forget him if left alone for twelve hours. Jack was buzzing and nervous for the first few minutes, sharing Hiccup's bed as the dragon trainer slowly drifted in and out of slumber, and Hiccup would see his wide eyes open and staring when he would occasionally phase drowsily out of sleep, unused to sharing a bed with anyone. Jack looked at him like an interesting fish just beyond the surface of the water. It was strange to have another person so close; usually the position was taken by Astrid or some other fair little thing he saw on and off, but it was all the more strange because of who and what Jack was. Jack faced Hiccup on his side, curled up, the knuckle of his first finger pressed between his lips. His eyes were open and stared, unblinking, at Hiccup for a long time. Hiccup found it hard to fall asleep and remain that way with such an intense gaze trained on him. Jack's cold, bare feet stuck out from under the heavy cloth, and he finally fell asleep, just before Hiccup did, with his hand on Hiccup's stomach. It was cold and thin, but heavy enough to feel powerfully real. It felt good, like a cold pillow in the summer, a welcome chill to Hiccup's burning fever.

The dreams were strange, as fever dreams typically are. Although Hiccup didn't remember any of them later, if he had they might have frightened him. In every single one of them, he died.

Hiccup woke the next morning feeling strangely refreshed, but only physically. Mentally he felt slightly worn, and it startled him when he rolled over to find Jack splayed out impossibly over his bed, blankets curled up around him like a protective cocoon, limbs sticking out at odd angles, mouth hanging open. Hiccup squinted and rubbed sleep from his eyes, his vision coming into focus. He could hear Jack's incessant mouthbreathing, but decided against waking him. He appeared hilariously relaxed compared to his nervous behavior the previous day, his head hanging back, mouth open, lily white neck exposed. His silvery eyelashes fanned out against his high, pale cheekbones, his white hair in a bedhead mess. Hiccup smiled a little to himself; so this was the elegance and grace of Jokul Frosti. He found it strangely comforting to know that such a human aspect could exist in such a nonhuman thing. In that moment, with the golden morning sunlight filtering through Hiccup's window and shining on Jack's chest, he almost looked like a normal boy. His skin was still strange and waxy though, like Hiccup could reach out and touch it only to find a marble statue in Jack's place. It still looked strange to Hiccup's eyes to see Jack's slow breath, the tide of it in and out with the rise and fall of his chest. It was like watching a painting draw breath.

After a minute of laying down, the sun rose high enough in the sky to land across Hiccup's face in his bed. It burned his eyes and signified that he was late to get up, so he sat up, his back popping into place and all of his muscles buzzing awake. He opened his mouth and yawned, eyes squinted, one side of his body colder than the other on account of Jack. Hiccup swung both of his legs over the side of the bed and began the process of attaching his prosthetic leg, which included many buckles and straps that his sleepy fingers had trouble

with. He cursed quietly under his breath when he tied it shut in the wrong place, only to undo the straps and lace the whole thing back up again, this time with moderate success. Hiccup thought that after so long he'd be able to do it in his sleep, but on some days he still tried to get out of bed like he had both feet.

He stood and stretched, arms in the air, his nightshirt pulled up so that the sun danced across his golden skin, the freckles parading down his naval strikingly dark compared to the way the sunbeams made the rest of him glow. Hiccup stumbled for a minute, stretching himself out, popping his shoulders and rubbing his eyes until his vision was perfectly crisp. Awake, he turned around to view Jack, who also had sun in his eyes but seemed not to care about it at all. Hiccup let out a single bark of a laugh and silently hoped that Jack had swallowed a bug in his sleep with his mouth hanging open like that.

Hiccup leaned over the bed and jostled Jack with his hand. It was hard for him not to draw back like he'd been stung; as touchy as Jack was, it was hard for Hiccup to touch him in turn. It was like trying to jostle awake a corpse. Hiccup tried again, shoving Jack's shoulder back and forth almost aggressively. Jack groaned and made a gross sound in the back of his throat when his tongue hit the roof of his mouth, cutting off the airflow. He snorted, coughed, and opened his eyes. They were little blue slits for a moment, staring grouchy up at Hiccup, who matched their temper.

Finally, Hiccup got sick of waiting and punched Jack right in his middle. Jack lurched and made a surprised squawk, then rolled off the bed and onto the floor with a loud thump. Hiccup waited a moment, but Jack opted simply to sit on the floor stubbornly and wait for him to leave.

"Get up, its breakfast time." Hiccup said. He felt strong enough to walk around today, so he might as well get done what he could. Breakfast, some chores, maybe take Toothless out to play, if not fly, if he had the strength. He felt capable, but he didn't want to succumb to wooziness in midair.

Hiccup went downstairs when Jack ignored him long enough, deciding it wasn't worth his time. His father was already up and had left for his morning duties, leaving a note for his son pinned under a fork on the table. It read simply 'Out. Be good to yourself today, you need your rest.' Hiccup was happy enough with that, and set about preparing something resembling breakfast. He went out to the cellar and grabbed some ingredients, laying everything out on the counter top and preparing some food. While things came to a simmer he went to gather some water and a wash basin and cleaned up properly, taking care of his teeth and hair. The cold water was unpleasant, but he didn't really have time to heat up a fire to get it going as it should, so he left it at that. Wet hair in the morning in Berk was always bad news, since even when the fireplace was going some parts of the house were very cold.

After a while Jack came trundling down the stairs, hair a mess, looking simply disheveled. Hiccup caught sight of him when he came into the kitchen, staff dragging the ground. Hiccup snorted and fixed Jack a plate of food, pushing him down to sit at the table and setting it in front of him. He didn't know if Jack even needed to eat, but he'd actually grown to tolerate the poor creature so he

might as well make him a quick meal.

"If I knew you'd be this grouchy I wouldn't have let you fall asleep." Hiccup said, pulling out his chair and sitting down across from Jack, who stared listlessly at him for a minute, looking groggy. Hiccup ate most of his breakfast in silence, Jack poking at his food every few minutes with one hand under the table. Hiccup eventually got fed up with his attitude. "Jack, if you-

There was a sudden glint in his eyes, and Jack's face quickly contorted into that of a smiling fox. His eyes snapped into focus, catching Hiccup's startled gaze, before he whipped his other hand up. It was, predictably, packed with snow. Hiccup felt it hit the center of his forehead like a rock, his eyes closing defensively, putting his hands up just a hair too late to stop it. He shouted and was sent toppling backwards onto the ground, kicking the underside of the table in the process and sending his plate flying onto the floor, where it landed upside down. His head throbbed angrily.

Hiccup screamed raw, unadulterated fury into the air while Jack cackled like a maniac from across the table. Hiccup bolted upright and scrambled to his feet, eyes finding Jack rolling in the air, clutching his sides, mouth open, cheeks pink with fresh giggles. Hiccup's blood boiled, and he grabbed a pan from the counter, swinging it at Jack only to come up empty. Jack flitted through the air in a way that was chaotic, pushed and pulled by a sudden, frightfully cold wind that sent Hiccup's nightshirt up and into his face, blinding him for a second and sending Jack into another hopeless fit of laughter. Hiccup ran after him, chasing Jack into the living room and over the chairs, up the stairs and then back down them. Hiccup had more than enough stamina, even though the yelling made his injured head hurt, shouting obscenities after Jack, who hadn't even bothered to eat the food Hiccup made for him.

After a few minutes Jack turned the only way he hadn't turned yet, which was out of the front door. He slammed it open and flew out into Hiccup's front yard, kicking up snow where his feet grazed the ground. Hiccup chased him out into the yard, snatching a hand on Jack's trouser leg. Jack made a panicked yelping sound and Hiccup felt a moment of triumph; only a moment though, before Jack's pants slipped down and the jolt made Hiccup let go, falling a few feet to land face first in the snow, cheeks stinging, eyes shocked. The whole thing happened so fast that when the reality of it all came crashing down, Hiccup immediately sat up in his yard and frantically looked around to see if anyone had witnessed such tomfoolery. Fortunately, his neighbors were all already out working, so nobody saw him running around and cursing at the air in his yard in his night clothes. Hiccup burned with shame and began the process of slinking back into his house, slamming the door after him when Jack tried to follow him inside.

Jack got in through a window anyway, and dropped snow down the back of Hiccup's shirt. The day was not off to a very good start.

* * *

><p>I guess that's the end of that, sorry if your eyes burn too much from general awfulness. My syntax leaves a lot to be desired.<p>

I'm excited to introduce Astrid soon, she's such a rad gal

End
file.